United Nations A/72/578–S/2017/901

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
1 November 2017
English
Original: Russian

General Assembly
Seventy-second session
Agenda item 99 (l)
General and complete disarmament: implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction

Security Council
Seventy-second year

Letter dated 25 October 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith comments by the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning the Syrian chemical dossier (see annex I), and also a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning the vote in the Security Council on 24 October 2017 on a resolution to extend the mandate of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism to investigate incidents of use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic (see annex II).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annexes circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 99 (l), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Nebenzia**

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Annex I to the letter dated 25 October 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Comments by the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning the Syrian chemical dossier

23 October 2017

In recent days the Security Council has once again focused its attention on the Syrian chemical dossier in connection with the anticipated release on 26 October of the regular report of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to investigate incidents of use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and also the expiry of the mandate of JIM on 16 November 2017.

Over the six months since the notorious chemical incident in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission, and then JIM, carried out extensive work, but all of it was done remotely, and without revealing the sources of information or other essential data, as required under the Chemical Weapons Convention. From the very outset, we have insisted that, in the interests of carrying out a fully professional and objective investigation, the international experts, in line with the standards of the Convention, should visit the site of the incident, as well as the Syrian airbase at Sha'irat, where, according to the United States of America, sarin used in Khan Shaykhun was stored. In May-June OPCW assured us that it was working on securing safe access to Khan Shaykhun, but it later declared that there was no need to visit the site because, supposedly, the use of sarin could be considered an established fact. The very same position was then taken by JIM as well. Recently, however, the Department of Safety and Security of the United Nations Secretariat informed the Security Council that there were actually guarantees of safe access to Khan Shaykhun, but the inspectors simply did not want to take advantage of them.

A strange situation also arose in connection with the issue of visiting the Sha'irat airbase. At our insistence, JIM representatives recently went to the base, but categorically refused to take samples in order to establish the presence or absence of sarin. With such an attitude, it is difficult, if not impossible, to expect a high-quality outcome of the investigation.

The United States of America is insisting on the immediate adoption, practically straightaway, of a resolution on extending the mandate of JIM. At the same time it is grossly distorting the Russian position by claiming that, allegedly, Moscow will block the extension of the mandate if the JIM findings have an anti-Syrian slant. Such allegations are completely groundless. Firstly, no one has seen any findings, since there is as yet no report, and Washington's desire under these circumstances to extend the mandate at all costs looks a little strange, to put it mildly. Secondly, we have always said and continue to maintain that our position on the extension of the mandate of JIM will depend, not on who will be found at fault, but on the quality of the investigation and its conformity with the requirements of the Convention.

In order for the Security Council to take a well-grounded decision on this issue, it is necessary, first, to read the report, particularly since the Security Council has not received any meaningful information about the work of JIM over the past year. There is no report, and yet they are insisting on extending the mandate. This

will not do. It is necessary to act in accordance with established practice: first, read the report on the outcome of the work of JIM, the structure created by the Security Council, over the period under review, and then consider the question of extending the mandate. There is no need to whip up hysteria once again.

Annex II to the letter dated 25 October 2017 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation concerning the vote in the Security Council on a resolution to extend the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism

24 October 2017

On 24 October 2017, the Security Council voted on the draft resolution submitted by the United States of America calling for a hasty extension of the mandate of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to investigate cases of use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic even before the release of a report by JIM on its work over the past year.

The Russian Federation voted against the draft resolution for reasons that we have explained repeatedly in public statements and in working contacts with other Security Council members. The main reason is that it makes no sense to adopt such important decisions without even assessing the performance of JIM. Without such an assessment, it is impossible to determine whether its mandate should be extended as is, or whether it should be renewed and adjusted, as envisaged in the Security Council's previous resolution 2319 (2016).

The Americans chose to proceed with a premature vote on the draft resolution in disregard of basic logic and of the long-established procedures of the Security Council. They were obviously guided by their own considerations, that are far removed from the purpose of the establishment of JIM. It has already become their trademark to rush headlong, crudely and brazenly imposing their position on others without taking the trouble to make any coherent arguments. We see this clearly in how allegations of Russian interference in the domestic affairs of the United States of America are being imposed on American society. The same methods are being used in the international arena. Damascus is being groundlessly accused of crimes and Moscow is being charged with allegedly providing cover. They lie shamelessly. They are literally holding hostage both JIM, and OPCW, as well as the Security Council, and their intransigence is not tempered by international law, diplomatic rules or even common sense.

This course of action is causing direct damage to the foundations of multilateral diplomacy, eviscerating the work of international bodies, including JIM, and reshaping it to suit American interests.

Our position is abundantly clear and consistent: those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be identified and duly punished. We were present from the start at the founding of JIM, and we hoped that its work would throw light on chemical crimes committed in Syria. In 2016 we agreed twice to extend the operation of JIM, broaden its scope to territories adjacent to Syria, and give its mandate an anti-terrorist focus. So we are now entitled to ask what has actually been done to carry out these decisions. What has the quality of the investigation been? To what extent does this work meet the high standards of the Chemical Weapons Convention? Is there not a need to make adjustments in order to make JIM more effective? Instead we are being asked to extend its mandate sight unseen. Apparently, they are afraid that a thoughtful analysis will lead to conclusions that Washington will not like.

The Russian Federation has always advocated that JIM should carry out its work in a systematic and organized manner. JIM is expected to produce a report on its performance in the very near future. We will study it very thoroughly and then suggest how to proceed.